

**Bored? Hungry?
Hungry and Bored?**
Spice up your time in quarantine with
recipes from Lois Lyon at the end of this newsletter



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

News, events & calendar of the Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists...Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties

Summer 2020

From the Desk of the **PRESIDENT**

Elaine "Muffi" Ruby

To our wonderful Indian Trail Master Naturalist Chapter Members:

We are entering the summer of 2020. Our Spring was like nothing we had ever anticipated.

Thank you, "News Letter Team" for being Faithful to share interesting information with the chapter.

Our last two monthly chapter meetings have been by email and Zoom. We haven't seen anyone since February. I hope that with the State Master

Naturalist Guidelines allowing us to slowly open up again and begin we will be able to meet. We will decide to meet together- even if it is outside.

We are looking into getting a Zoom account which should be good for all. It might help going forward for those who are not able to come to our meetings.

Hope you are all staying safe and ENJOYING Life!!!

Elaine Ruby
President



Monthly meetings are held on the 4th Monday (usually) of each month at 6 p.m., program at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, Waxahachie. Our office is located in TexasAgrilife at 701 S. I-35E, Suite 3, Waxahachie, TX 75165 | 972-825-5175
Visit our website at <http://txmn.org/indiantrail>

Kachina Prairie March-May 2020

By Jim Patak

As I mentioned in my last article, 2020 continues to be a very slow year for the Prairie, that is, our interaction with the land so far. The weather has become more cooperative, for scheduling workdays, but then COVID-19 hit our world and workdays are still indefinite.

Fortunately, our Prairie has not been phased by these "man-kind" issues. The Prairie looks really great. With the help of "The Wildflowers of Ellis County, Texas" handbook several of you worked on, I was able to identify the following: Woolly White, aka Old Plainsman or Wild Cauliflower; Yarrow or Milfoil; Blue-eyed Grass; Basketflower or Powderpuff; Horsemint or Lemon Mint; Indian Blanket or Firewheel; Texas Thistle; Meadow Pink or Rose Gentian; Prairie Parsley aka Wild Dill; Black-eyed Susan; and Dandelion. There were, however, many other plants that I could not ID (no picture), but that's my shortcoming.

Of the grasses I could readily ID: Annual Rye

Grass; Bristle Grass; Rescue Grass; several Switch Grasses; Little and KR Bluestem and the ever-present Johnson Grass, but at a greatly reduced population than in previous years. I was dismayed in that I did not see any Big Bluestem. Maybe I just missed it. Of course, our Bluebonnets and Indian or Texas (if you prefer) Paintbrush have gone to seed.

Of vines: Honeysuckle; Dewberry, Greenbriar and Poison Ivy. BTW, the poison ivy is everywhere, this year. I am also happy to report that the population of Red Sumac, Wild Plum and Grapevines, up on the North End, is also greatly diminished.

The monthly Ennis City Parks Board meetings have been cancelled to date. However, wearing my Citizen Forester hat, I transported 20+ saplings, mostly black walnut, from Cheryl Michael's home in Red Oak to the Ennis Parks Department HQ, week of the 15 May. The Parks Dept employees are planting them in the various City Parks, there are several in need of trees. I planted one black walnut, outside the trail on the south end of KP.

COVER: Snowy Egret I came upon a feeding frenzy of herons, egrets, and ibises in a shallow ditch. This one was the last to leave. Good year for tadpoles I guess.

NATURE NERD **QUARANTINE** OBSERVATIONS

By Madeline Kelley-Schwoch

What would happen to all of us if we didn't have nature to see us through this quarantine? I am so thankful to have some folks in my world who appreciate nature and

share it with others.

What follows are some neat things people decided to share during this down time and what they discovered about their world when they took the time to "slow down".



Sue Frary March 24

– Take a little drive to see the flowers. Photo taken on Sugar Ridge Road east of Palmer. No tourists... was very peaceful. Grab shot from the car window."

Someone shared on Google Drive April

6–Learning to bake artisan bread - science experiments with yeasty beasties.



Diane Baxter Responded on April 6– Yum! Inspires me to get out my recipes and make a hearty and healthy bread. Looks wonderful....good job! I have been busy sewing face masks for the Dallas Zoo. They have reached out for masks for their Zoologists (previous known as zookeepers). We are enjoying the last of our garden's lettuce and spinach. Ready to plant our Spring/Summer garden.

Kathy Rushing April

6–I have spent the last 6 weeks in a hand cast due to breaking my pinky finger. As you can see from the photo the doctor did not set correctly



Deborah Rayfield Responded to Kathy on April 6–

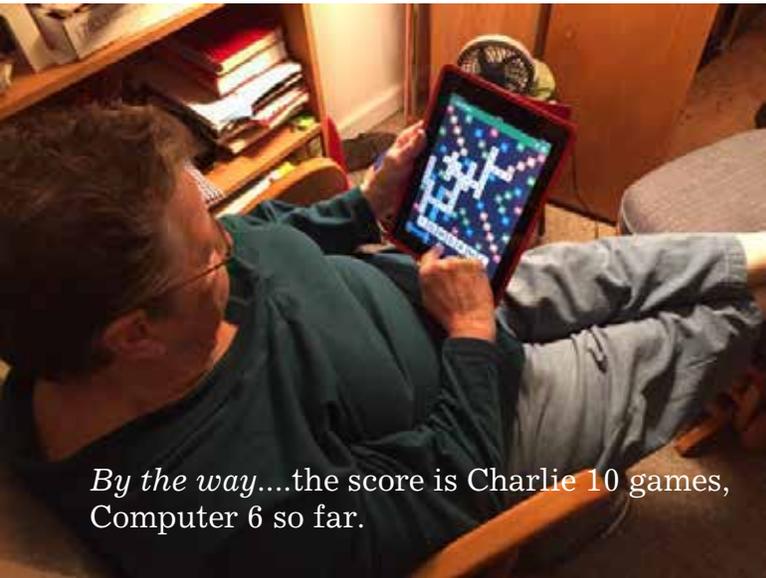
Kathy, that reminds me of my right-hand ring finger. Years ago, when we had milking goats, I had my hand around the largest goat's collar and she bolted! My tip of finger is forever bent down thanks to Camille. Now, since I have so much arthritis in all my fingers, it doesn't look so odd! So, don't worry Kathy - with age it will fade away.....

By the way - to those taking care of the Bluebird boxes at Mockingbird. I have two boxes with either fledged or ready to fly bluebirds. I imagine that the boxes at Mockingbird are at the same stage. If you are not sure and want to clean out the box between nestings, remember to observe the box for at least 10-15 minutes to make sure there are no little birds in there. You don't want them to frighten and jump out early. I'm available for questions!!



Charlie Grindstaff April 6—Hey Indian

Trailblazers, as you can see from these pictures we are well and staying busy, but we sure miss seeing you all. Are you missing everyone too? We would love to see what you have been up to during this Stay-At-Home



By the way....the score is Charlie 10 games, Computer 6 so far.

period. I bet everyone else would like it too. Can you send a picture? Or at least an email & let us know you are well. Last week I took down the snowman that has been hanging outside our door since before Christmas only to be shocked when a wren flew out of it...OMG!

Kathleen Mack April 7— So I have not been doing a lot, but I do live close to Tower Road in Midlothian, so I can take a walk and see lots of pretty flowers and pollinators and take pictures for observations on iNat. If you want to see them, you can check them out under Mertmack. I have attached one picture and I have a question for my plant friends. I never see pollinators on Texas Paintbrush. Seems like such a beautiful flower would attract something. So, my question is does Texas Paintbrush have any pollinators. Yes, I could look it up, but I thought some of you might be bored. If you are really bored you can take guess as to how I got the name Mert.



There was a nest with 4 eggs in it. Needless to say, I hung it back up as fast as I could and I am happy to report we have lots of little “feed me” chirps coming from it this week. We are practicing social distancing and mama wren has not attacked me since. Sure hope you are well and please let us know if you need anything.



Madeline Kelley April 7— It finally quit raining so I enjoyed my morning walk and took some nature pictures. The one on the left was a little flower I had not seen before growing in a neighbor’s yard.

Deborah Rayfield April 8- This is the female bird calling to the babies to leave their box.

As each baby leaves the box, they fly all over in different directions (first time to use the wings!) the parents spend a good bit of time rounding them up into one spot, usually a cedar tree. They will spend up to two weeks learning from their parents how to hunt their own food, but in the meantime, the parents will be bringing back insects to the hungry babies.



Eileen Berger April 9- How sweet. I have phoebe nest on my front porch, and 4 babies fledged on Sunday. Also, yesterday I went out to work in weed-infested yard, so I went on front porch to get my green wagon. A young copperhead snake had tried to go through the mesh side of the wagon and was stuck! So, I pulled the wagon out into higher grass away from the house and pulled on its tail which probably didn't feel too good, but I let him down into the grass, he shook himself and slid away. No, I didn't get a picture as I was in a hurry to get him out of there as he had been there since last night.

Charlie Grindstuffs April 9 Response to above- Only a Nature Nerd would pull on a copperhead tail! GO NATURE NERDS!



Jim West April 9 - They've been working on their nest for days! The entire nest looks like it's made out of spider web and lichen. Here, she's threading spider webs into it.

Sue Frary April 9-
Is this a rat snake?
Was in family garage tonight.



Thomas Hollingsworth Replied April 9- Probably a Broad Banded Water Snake. Non-venomous and, good friend to have around. They can still be onery and prone to bite, but the bite is harmless apart from some tooth punctures. You could confirm with *What Kind of Snake is This* Education Group on FB. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/whatsnakeisthis/>

Jennifer Zarate May 4- Before I move him..... I wanted to have a second opinion.....Rat Snake; he's nice and full!

The Cycle of Life in HIDDEN CANYON

By Tom Hollingsworth

Red Shouldered Hawks have nested in our yard for several years. This year, tragedy struck. Owls, Hawks, Crows, and Chickadees recently engaged in a series of events that revealed to me a poignant reminder of the cycle of life.

According to Kenn Kaufman, Field Editor for *Audubon* magazine, the definition of “raptor” has been debated for years, and “there has been no universal agreement on exactly which birds should be included under that term.”

(<https://www.audubon.org/news/ask-kenn-kaufman-falcons-hawks-owls-vultures-what-exactly-raptor>)



It is now recognized that the seizing and grappling traits of raptor talons, their dexterity for piercing, clutching, and carrying prey, is a defining characteristic of these birds which distinguishes them from other predatory avian.

Raptors have a reputation. Their presence changes the behavior of wildlife in the eco-community. Recently, three

pairs of raptors met a crisis in the tiny, vale of Hidden Canyon (Cedar Hill): *Buteo lineatus* (Red Shouldered Hawk), *Megascops asio* (Eastern Screech Owl), and *Bubo virginianus* (Great Horned Owl).

The backstory is heart warming. Rearing one chick the first year and two the second, the Red Shouldered Hawks were diligent parents. Each year, I monitored the chicks’ daily progress. It was an honor to observe their first flights. I was thrilled to get close views of their behaviors as they matured. My wife and I were excited as the adults prepared for a third brood. Suddenly, things changed.

Here’s a linear account. A Screech Owl settled in to our nest box about 30 feet from the hawk nest.

Chickadees harassed the female when she sunned, but the Screech Owl and Red Shouldered Hawks were copasetic with one another. After several weeks of normal activity, the mood changed one night. A pair of Great Horned Owls, familiar locals, stayed through the morning near the hawk nest.

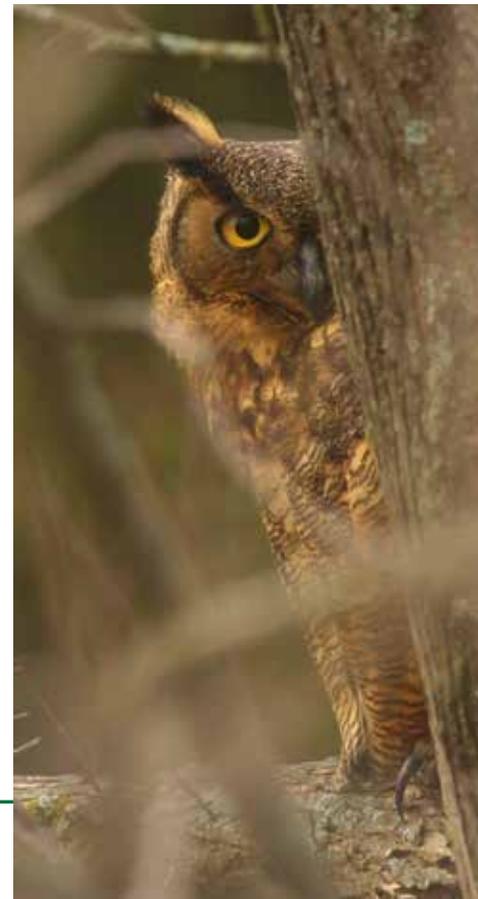
For several nights and mornings, the owls returned and got bolder. They harassed the female hawk. Chickadee, titmouse, and owl commotion attracted the attention of crows. A murder of crows began to dog the area relentlessly.

The Screech Owl abandoned her nest. The Great Horned Owl took over the hawk nest. The hawks departed after two weeks of failed nest coups. Crows cawed and hen-pecked tree limbs surrounding the female owl. I caught a glimpse of an owl nestling. After constant crow marauding, the Great Horned Owl abandoned her nest. The owl chick didn’t make it. In two months, three raptor broods were lost. Yet, I know each critter took its natural course of action.

After much reflection and a little investigation I realized the Great Horned Owls likely lost their nest when several lots were cleared for new construction in our neighborhood. Our heavy woods, creeks, and hills have not been disturbed in decades since the neighborhood was formed. Great Horned Owls nest in tree cavities, the crowns at the junction of big limbs, and...in other birds’ nests.

During this evening’s walk, my wife and I heard and saw a mating pair of young, Red Shouldered Hawks. Their call is a higher pitch and is choppier than the seasoned adults. The young hunt more on the ground. An offspring from last year has found a mate; I just know it. A small weight has lifted from my naturalist’ soul; the cycle of life endures beyond human disruption.

We all have a footprint on Mother Nature; I pray that footprint becomes more...copasetic with her.



MR. WEST'S NEIGHBORHOOD



By Jim West

I was lurking in one of my spots, actually watching a pair of Blue-gray Gnat catchers build their nest when I noticed wood chips drifting down every so often. I slowly moved off down the road, turned around and saw this ► on my return; a female Downy Woodpecker building its nest. Saw several shift changes which they did about every 30 minutes, both while chipping the nest out and feeding the chicks but, I missed the chicks' first flight. If these parents were as cagey as the Red Bellied Woodpeckers I watched last year, it would have been fun.



MEMBER P | R | O | F | I | L | E

Sandy Ashbrook

Interviewed by Lois Lyon

LL: What activities do you enjoy when you're not busy with chapter programs?

SA: Like so many members of our Master Naturalist chapter, I am worried about habitat loss for birds, insects, animals, and plants. Every time I see a bulldozer I get sick to my stomach. So, I am trying to let mother nature have her way at my place and let the native plants and birds and insects spread out and thrive. The easiest way to do that is by being lazy and stop mowing. It is absolutely amazing what gifts mother nature brings to you without even planting a thing. Luckily, there are no laws out in the county that say I can't let my grass and plants grow. But my horses, turkeys and peafowl also help keep the grass down to a low growl. They like to eat some of the wild flowers that grow but mostly they keep the grass down so there is more room for the green milkweed, native thistles, Indian blanket, bee balm, Mexican hats, Turks caps, Texas stars, Texas dandelions, wild petunias, dove weed, plantain, basket flowers and the list goes on and on.

And since the Covid virus has kept us all at home for several months, I have been working on eliminating some of the more invasive plants, like nodding thistle and ragweed, although my turkeys and peafowl love ragweed and my horses and donkey eat the beautiful purple heads and young thistle leaves. In the winter the ragweed gives cover and food to thousands of small finch and sparrow type birds; and if I had quail, it would feed them, so I guess there is a reason for every species.

LL: How did you become interested in the Texas Master Naturalist program?

SA: Jim West is friends with my husband, Larry, and he told Larry that I should sign up for the next Texas Master Naturalist class. I did not right away, but finally I started looking into it as I was at one time a Texas wildlife rehabilitator, caring for injured and



orphaned mammals, like raccoons, skunks, opossums, and squirrels, etc. So, this program sounded like it was right down my alley. And I have to say, it has completely changed and overwhelmed me. I can't begin to tell you how much I have learned about our native Texas and how amazing it is. And the more you learn, the more you realize, there is so much out there still to learn and so little time!!

LL: What nature/environmental issues interest you the most?

SA: Species extinction and loss of habitat for all species is such a serious issue that I hope I can do more to change especially in teaching about nature through the Texas Master Naturalist program.

LL: When you are not involved with Texas Master Naturalists, what types of things do you enjoy?

SA: There are not many activities that I don't enjoy. I have more than 30 horses and 20 dogs and many birds like peafowl, turkeys, and parrots. So, when not caring for them, then I get to spend a few weekends watching my grandchildren playing in softball tournaments and swimming, playing games or just hanging out with them. Oh yes, I also work full time at my job for Social Security so not much time to go on vacations, etc. but I enjoy camping, kayaking, and just being in the great outdoors.

Acopian Bird Savers, aka Zen Wind Curtains

By Dan Rayfield

TO THOSE OF US WHO LOVE BIRDS, there are few sounds more disheartening than the unmistakable thud that occurs when a bird runs into a window. We spend a great deal of time and effort to attract birds to our yards so that we can enjoy both our resident species as well as the occasional visitors we get during the spring and fall migrations. We feel almost personally responsible when one of them fall victim to that often fatal error in judgment and fly into a window. Who among us has not run outside to gently hold the bird in a cupped hand and hope that it regains its senses? All too often the collision is fatal and it always leaves us feeling terrible.

That is why I was excited to hear about a new (to me) way to reduce the number of bird / window encounters. It was mentioned in the recent Audubon webinar on the use of native plants. In the webinar they used the term Acopian Bird Savers but in researching this article I also saw them referred to as Zen Wind Curtains. I prefer the latter term so I will use that.

Before I get into the particulars of the device, I want to briefly touch on the problem of bird window collisions.

How many birds are killed by glass collisions in the U.S. each year?

Smithsonian researchers attempted to estimate the extent of the problem 2014. They estimated that homes and other buildings one to three stories tall accounted for 44 percent of all bird fatalities or about 253 million bird deaths annually. Larger, low-rise buildings four to 11 stories high caused 339 million deaths. High-rise buildings, 11 floors and more, kill 508,000 total birds annually. By combining these numbers, the Smithsonian reported that collisions likely kill between 365 million and 1 billion birds annually just in the United States. - Source: American Bird Conservancy Obviously, these numbers are just estimates but even on the low side that is a lot of bird deaths.

In looking at any problem we are always encouraged to "think globally but act locally". By building and installing Zen Wind Curtains, we can "act locally" to reduce the number of bird strikes in our own small corner of the planet.

Let me begin by stating that I have not yet built one of these devices. The senior master naturalist on our place did build and install a grid of small branches in

front of the window overlooking the feeders and bird bath. That definitely reduced the number of strikes on that window but, it is a labor intensive process whereas the Zen Wind Curtain appears to be much easier. Since I have not yet built one, I will refer you to www.birdsavers.com for pictures and complete instructions.

For purposes of this article just picture in your mind a series of 1/8 inch para-cord lines spaced approximately 4 inches apart and secured at the top to either a piece of J channel or PVC pipe. That top piece is attached to the top of the window to be protected either by screws or Velcro. In most applications the bottom of the para-cord lines is not secured and so tend to move about gently in the breeze in front of the window. (Hence the Zen Wind Curtain moniker.) The whole idea seems to be to break up the reflection from the window's surface and thus warn the bird that "something" is there. I could not find any definitive bird strike reduction statistics but anecdotal reports say, it is very effective.

Creating a Zen Wind Curtain seems like a great project for our current self-isolation circumstances. While remaining socially distanced we can inexpensively and easily create something that will directly benefit the birds in our yards.

And unlike other projects I attempt, there is very little chance that I will seriously injure myself using para-cord and PVC.





WILDSCAPES

By Eileen Berger

One of the goals of the Master Naturalist program is to help conserve habitat for wildlife on both public and private land. The term “wildscape” was created to indicate an area which has been managed and enhanced by providing food, water, shelter and space to benefit the soil, insects, reptiles, amphibians and mammals that reside in that area. I have always liked to garden, and after hearing about wildscaping, I have created wildscapes in several of the places where I have lived.

Humans tend to see nature through the filter of what it can do for us. When you look at your balcony, patio, yard or acreage through the eyes of the native species that also reside there, you are forced to readjust your idea of the “perfect landscape.” Who is it perfect for? Most suburban yards are virtual wastelands to the insects that provide food for many other species. We rake up leaves, clear out flowerbeds, cut our grass and pick up fallen limbs. All these actions remove habitat for wild creatures. Even leaving a small area perhaps at the back or side of your property will increase its attractiveness to nature.

Native species of moths and butterflies need native plants as hosts, and most need a singular species due to the unique chemical needs of the larval stages. Everyone knows about the monarchs and milkweed, but few realize that all their relatives are also that specific. Many of the common grasses, shrubs and bedding plants that you see in your neighborhood came from another continent, and that is usually Asia. There are insects in that continent that “use” those plants, but they do not live here. So, native plants are the best.

If you are planning to create a wildscape, whether large or small, the first step is to create a plan on paper. Before you do that, I would suggest doing some research either online or by reading and studying some great resources. The websites associated with Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, as well as the Audubon Society, have great resources. Hopefully you can soon also actually visit Texas Discovery Garden, Dallas Arboretum, BRIT and the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, as well as Molly Holler Wildscape in the Veterans Park in Arlington to see examples of plants that are suitable for our area and soils. Take a walk in

Mockingbird Nature Park in Midlothian, Tx or a drive through the surrounding countryside to get ideas about the plants that used to grow everywhere before we arrived. I would like to recommend several books that I have referred to for guidance. The first is *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy. He is an entomologist who has become an expert about habitat loss for insects and the dire consequences that can result from that loss. The other two books, which are specifically for Texas, give extensive native plant lists and step-by-step help for planning your wildscape. The first is *Texas Wildscapes Gardening for Wildlife* by Kelly Conrad Bender. The other is *Native Texas Plants* by Sally and Andy Wasowski. You can find these books both new and used online.

If you are beginning your wildscape in an area that is bare right now, you can use plants or seeds. If you want to buy native seeds for grasses and wildflowers, I recommend ordering them from Native American Seed in Junction, Tx. Their seed collections do not contain any filler seeds of non-native species. Beware buying wildflower seeds at the big box stores as they do have “wildflower” seeds that do not occur in the U.S. If, on the other hand, you are attempting to change out some of your Bermuda grass lawn for a wildscape, that will be more of a challenge. You probably know that digging Bermuda grass just encourages it to spread. I was 95% successful in discouraging it by completely covering the grass with a layer of dry molasses and then with 3 inches of compost, then covering that with four or five sheets of newspaper. I was planting perennial native plants in the midst of this. I covered the newspaper with 3 inches of native cedar mulch.

Yes, this is a lot of work, and you must be very

vigilant in watching for the Bermuda to come back, as it will. If you are removing St. Augustine grass, that is much easier and the grass will just pull up, or you can dig it and use it to patch the lawn elsewhere. I recommend that you start with a small area and add a little each season. You will be surprised how many birds, insects, and other creatures you can attract with just a four by ten-foot area.

A source of water is another essential component. It does not have to be moving water, but you will always get more creatures if it is moving, such as a fountain or even a pond. A simple terracotta saucer with an inch of water will be appreciated.

I buy native plants in the spring and fall at Texas Discovery Gardens’ plant sales, Dogwood Canyon’s plant sales, and you can find Native Plant Society of Texas plant sales in our area. Several nurseries in North Texas also stock native plants. I even find some at big box stores as they respond to demand. That is why becoming familiar with the plants that are native to our area is important, as they are the most likely to thrive. I have plants in my yard that are native to other parts of the state and even some from other states, but it has been a trial and error sort of process that can get expensive. Pay attention to the water, soil and temperature needs of plants you are tempted to order from growers, as well as the elevation of that plant in its native range.

Finally, once you have planted your wildscape, whether seeds or plants, be sure to water regularly. Even if a plant is drought tolerant and does not need much water as an established plant, I water all transplants for one growing season at least. Protect your investment and good luck.



Eastern Phoebe, in a Wildscape

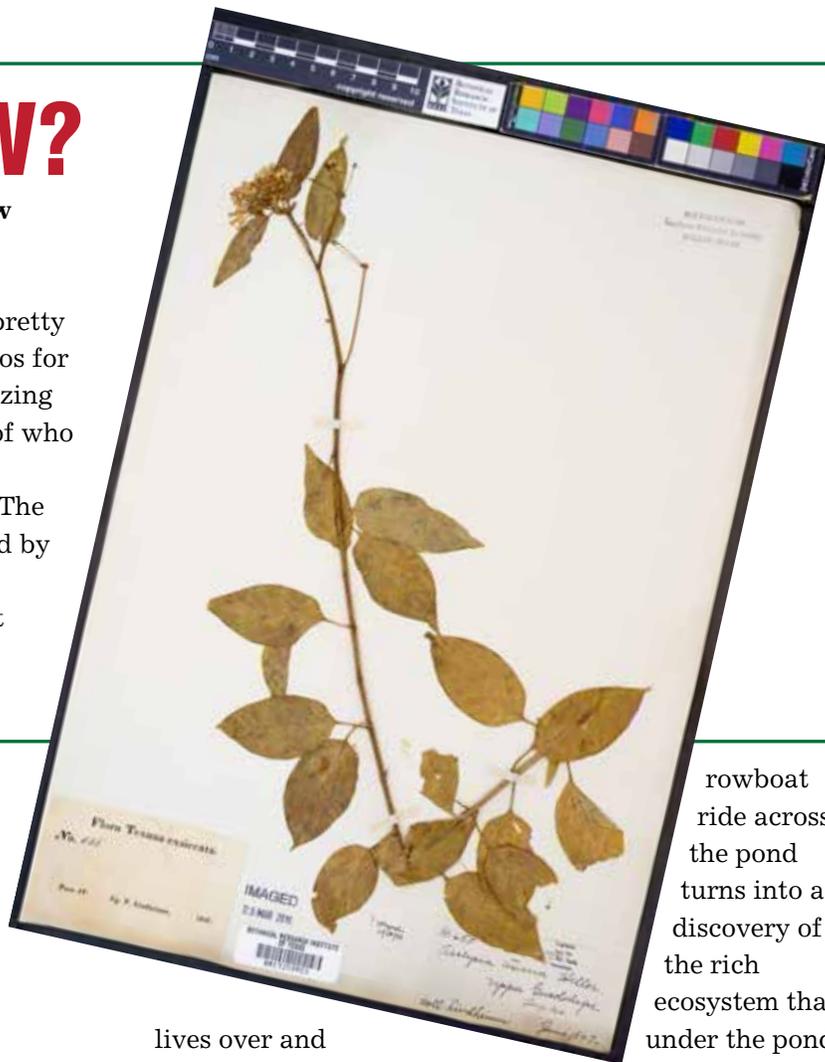
DID YOU KNOW?

What Matthew Bacon Found?

I wanted to share something that I thought was pretty cool. I was digitizing some photos for BRIT, when I came across an amazing specimen. Well, amazing because of who collected it. It was collected by F.

Lindheimer. Yes, THAT Lindheimer. The guy we learned about in class. Collected by him in 1847 - 173 years ago!

Anyway, I just thought that was pretty neat and wanted to share it with those that would appreciate it



Summer Reads For Your Junior Naturalist

By Megan Bacon

Explore the wonder of nature with your kids or grandkids even when it's too hot to get outside.

Picture Books:

Tiny, Perfect Things by M.H. Clark - A grandfather and his granddaughter go for a walk through their neighborhood searching for tiny, perfect things. This book is beautifully illustrated by Madeline Kloepper and challenges your children to spot the tiny treasures hidden among the bushes and fences. A great book to read together before going on a walk. It will encourage you both to be better observers.

Finding Wild by Megan Wagner Lloyd - Two children step off the subway and find wild fields, forests, mountains, and meadows around them. The author uses language to show kids that nature is about more than just what you see- it's also the smell, taste, touch, and sounds. This one will inspire you to escape the city and find wild.

Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt by Kate Messner - Up in the garden it's time to plant with Nana but what is happening down in the dirt? This charming book takes its readers on a journey up and down, spring to winter, to discover all the wonderful things happening in their backyard garden. The character's joy in the garden will be inspiring.

Over and Under the Pond by Kate Messner - A sunset

rowboat ride across the pond turns into a discovery of the rich ecosystem that under the pond.

lives over and The gorgeous mixed-media illustrations showcase all the amazing animals and plants that flourish together. This is a smart book that weaves factual information into a lovely story. There's even a companion guide at the end to learn more about the animals featured.

Non-Fiction:

Exploring Nature: Journal for Kids by Kim Andrews A wonderful guide to get your junior naturalist started in nature journaling. The first half of this book takes you step by step on how to safely observe and record, and ideas for making it your own. The second half of the book is your nature journal, with pages to record data and open spaces for drawing or adding photos. A great starting point for elementary age kids.

In My Backyard Sticker Activity Book by National Geographic Kids - An entertaining activity book with over 1000 stickers to keep your kids busy during those hot summer days. *In My Backyard* is full of fun facts about common backyard creatures, along with puzzles and coloring activities. There are also other themes in the same series like Super Space, Fierce Animals, and On Safari.

HIKING THE TRAILS

By Wendy Sheppard

As an outdoor instructor for the world's largest organization for girls, you can imagine my job has been unique the past several months. My normal job of helping girls and families off a 50 foot rock climbing and zip line tower, teaching teamwork and leadership on our low ropes course, on the archery range, or leading hikes over our 92 acre property has looked a whole lot different. Just like the rest of the U.S., my time has been spent mostly indoors, attending & leading zoom meetings, writing curriculum for when we are back together, & continuing training on a job that I love.

I never feel happier than when I am out and about with our members or visitors, but the honest truth is that you don't need someone like me to enjoy the outdoors. The best thing you could do right now is just be outside.

Don't be overwhelmed. Start simple. Find a city trail in a length that suits your preference. Those of us in Ellis County are extremely lucky that we have locations like the Waxahachie City Hike and Bike Trail, Midlothian's Mockingbird Trail Nature Park, or Ennis's Kachina Prairie. The locations offer great views of nature with lengths that aren't too terribly long and you encounter far less people than you would somewhere like the Katy Trail, allowing us to remain distant from other visitors.

Starting out, you want to pack light. Depending on the trail you choose, be sure to pack enough water plus a little extra, sunscreen, and bug spray. If you've chosen a longer hike, a healthy snack wouldn't be a bad idea to enjoy while you take in your surroundings. Just make sure to choose something that doesn't melt. We are in Texas.

We know being active outside is great for our physical health, but many neglect to look at it for our mental health. Did you know that hiking in a natural environment versus a city environment has a lot of more added benefits? Studies have shown that you have a greater decrease in negative thoughts, reduced mental fatigue, a boost in creativity, & increase in skills needed for complex problem solving. We also have an increase in the volume of our hippocampus, a part of our brains that regulate long term & spatial

(navigational) memory.

So, you're out on a trail, now what? This is a perfect time to shift your thoughts. Your goal is just to be there. Take in the smells. Is the scent of honeysuckle in the air? Listen to the wind through the trees or a squirrel as it shuffles through the leaves. Notice the variations of green and colors of the wildflowers. Reach out and feel the leaves of a rough leaf dogwood tree. There is nothing expected of you.

Doesn't sound like your

cup of tea? Challenge yourself instead. On each hike, find 3 plants, insects, or animals you can't identify. Take pictures of them and upload to iNaturalist via their free phone app or desktop website (iNaturalist.org). Naturalists or other citizen scientists help you determine what they are and that in turn leads to research of the animals and plants that are available in different areas. As you progress, learn how to document the size of leaves, whether or not the leaves are opposite one another or alternate up a branch, size of footprints or scat. The next time you are out, you'll enjoy pointing out to friends or family that the squirrel is a Fox or a Gray in East Texas or that the triangular hole on the path was made by an armadillo. You might even joke that bobcat scat looks like a string of chocolate marshmallows squished together.

In order to keep our great outdoors great, and around for our future use, we must continue to work to maintain it while we visit. On hikes, a great way to remember that is "take only pictures, leave only footprints." Stay on trails that have already been created. Carry out any trash you may create. Want to make your environment a better place? Carry an empty grocery sack to use for any trash others may have left. Observe animals from a safe distance. If you must take a sample, make sure that it is only for a specimen that is plentiful. If you've only seen 4-5 of a particular flower, it probably isn't the best idea to take one. Treat the outdoors as if you were visiting someone's home because it is - the homes of our animal friends, of the flora, and the insects that make all these possible.

See ya on the trails!

NATURALIST reads

Book review by Charlie Grindstaff

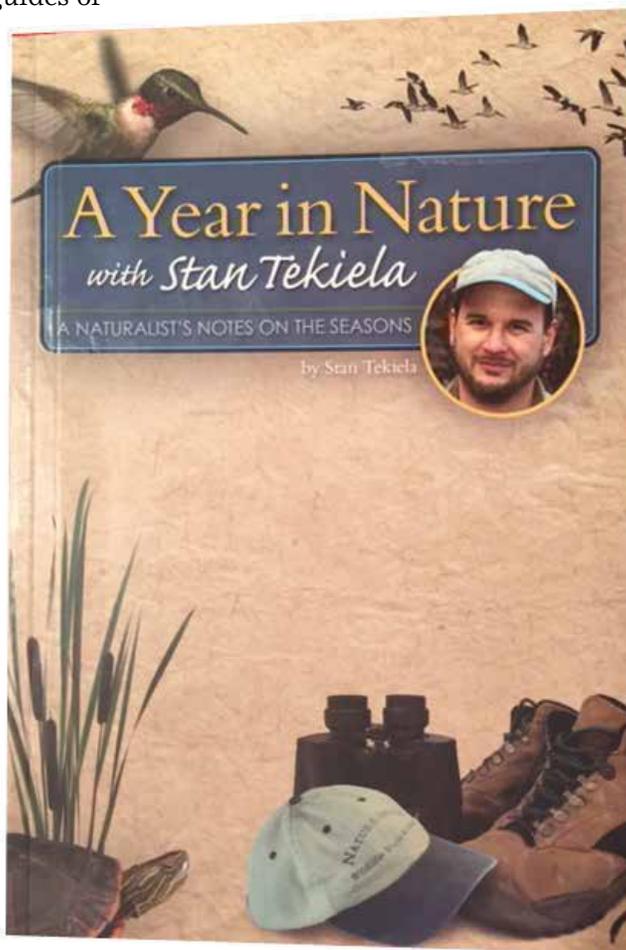
A Year in Nature with Stan Tekiela A Naturalist's Notes on the Seasons

Adventure Publications, 2011

Hopefully you are well aware of Stan Tekiela, and probably own at least one of his 200 small (4.5" x 6" typically) state specific field guides or nature books. I believe he has written 8 books about Wildflowers, Trees, Birds, Cactus, and Mammals of Texas.

This 150 page book consists of 64 "Nature Smart" and "Stan's Travel Notes" syndicated newspaper articles written by Stan Tekiela over the past 20 years. The articles are organized by months and cover everything from wood ticks, bird eggs, scent marks, Bracken Bat Cave, meteor showers, sphinx moths, mushrooms, antlers to elf owls. It is obvious he wrote these articles for the general public with little naturalist training...he takes great pains to explain any terms or phrases that are possibly unfamiliar, like entomologist or pelage (a fancy word to describe fur) or nocturnal (sleeps during the day). Although he leaves the public in the dark when he mentions Common Poorwills are very cryptic in color.

He lives in Minnesota and being from there myself, I especially enjoyed the articles about the Showy Lady's slipper (state flower of MN) and the Northern Lights, which I have seen. Many of his articles are from his travels to photograph bats, birds, and plants for books or field guides for many states. Texas, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, Alaska and Mexico are featured.



This is a fun, easy to read book that I enjoyed keeping in my car for those times when I had to wait for anything. I could read an article or two in those few minutes instead of tapping my fingers and feeling like my time was being wasted. Many of the articles just reinforced things I had learned through Texas Master Naturalist training; but there were some interesting revelations. Like Red-headed Woodpeckers are one of only 4 species of the 200 woodpecker species in the world that store food (acorns and hickory nuts) for later consumption. And

they are only one of 3 woodpecker species that feeds on the ground. Virginia opossums have more teeth than any other land mammal—50 teeth, all short and pointy, no grinding molars. The tips of their long, naked, pinkish tails often turn black from frostbite in northern states. Who knew the Emperor Penguin of Antarctica has about 30,000 feathers (I don't know who counted them) while hummingbirds have only about 1,000 feathers? I also learned that the Striped Skunk rarely climbs trees, while Spotted Skunks make regular trips into trees in search of food and to escape predators. I have never thought about looking up in trees for skunks. Porcupines have long guard hairs on their upper backs with quills only on their rumps or tail, not all over their bodies like I

thought.

Pine, spruce or fir tree? Two or more needles in a bundle and you have a pine; one needle per bundle and you have "S" for spruce and square needle or "F" for fir and flat needle. Learn something new every day. The article called "Antler Ornament" really surprised me and turned out to be my favorite; but I am not going to tell you the result of a researcher wearing a stuffed moose head with antlers on his chest (think reverse back pack) and interacting with bull moose. I will happily loan you the book if you want to find out what happened.



WAXWINGS

By Jim Bush

Cedar waxwings in morning mist
swarming the fountain,
a flurry of wings through fog,
animation defined,
masked and accented
red and yellow
gleaming splashed water.
Today is the first day of Spring
and they have made it official.

MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM MISSION: To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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The mission of this newsletter is to inform, educate and entertain Texas Master Naturalists and their circle of friends.



Easy Crock Pot Pulled Pork Sandwich Recipe

★★★★★ 5 from 5 reviews

Author: [Arlene Mobley - Flour On My Face](#) Prep Time: 5 mins Cook Time: 4 hours

Total Time: 4 hours 5 minutes Yield: 8 servings Category: Crock Pot Recipes

Method: Slow Cooker Cuisine: American

Description

This Easy Crock Pot Pulled Pork Sandwich recipe will easily serve a family of five with leftovers.

Crock Pot Pulled Pork Sandwiches is an easy way to enjoy the flavors of barbecue pulled pork without using the grill.

Ingredients

- 4 pounds boneless pork ribs
- 1 bottle Sweet Baby Ray Barbecue Sauce or your favorite brand
- 1 teaspoon [dry mustard](#) or a tablespoon of yellow mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 3/4 cup brown sugar (optional)

Instructions

- 1. Pour half the bottle barbecue sauce into the bottom of the crock pot.
- 2. Add all the boneless pork ribs to the crock pot.
- 3. Pour the remaining barbecue sauce over the boneless pork ribs.
- 4. Add the [dry mustard](#), garlic powder, and brown sugar if using.
- 5. Stir well to cover the pork ribs with barbecue sauce.
- 6. Cook on high for 4 hours or low for 6 to 8 hours (depends on the thickness of the boneless pork ribs).
- 7. When the pork ribs are cooked through use a fork to pull the tender pork meat apart.
- 8. Serve on buns with a side of [homemade sweet coleslaw](#) and a [pasta salad](#).
- 9. Serves 8+



How To Make Homemade Coleslaw

Author: [Arlene Mobley - Flour On My Face](#) Prep Time: 20 minutes Total Time: 20 minutes

Yield: 12 Servings 1x Category: Side Dish Method: Chopped Cuisine: American

Description

HOW TO MAKE COLESLAW

How to make a homemade Coleslaw recipe for sweet coleslaw. If you love KFC coleslaw than you will love this copycat KFC coleslaw recipe. Watch the video to see how to finely chop cabbage for coleslaw.

Ingredients

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/4 cup real buttermilk (no substitutions)
- 1/2 cup Hellman's Mayonnaise
- 2 ½ tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 ½ tablespoon white vinegar
- ½ teaspoon [salt](#)
- ¼ teaspoon [ground black pepper](#)
- 4 cups finely chopped cabbage
- ¼ cup shredded carrot

Instructions

- 1 Mix the dressing ingredients in a large spouted [measuring cup](#) and set aside.
- 2 Chop cabbage finely. See video.
- 3 Peel and grate the carrot.
- 4 Toss the cabbage and carrot with the coleslaw dressing.
- 5 Cover the bowl and refrigerate at least 2 hours before serving. Overnight is best.
- 6 Makes 12 servings.



Best Baked Beans Recipe

★★★★★ 6 from 1 reviews

Author: [Arlene Mobley - Flour On My Face](#) Prep Time: 10 mins Cook Time: 2 hours 30 mins

Total Time: 2 hours 40 minutes Yield: 12 Servings 1x Category: BBQ Side Dish Method: Baked

Cuisine: American

Description

A family favorite quick Baked Beans recipe that will feed a crowd or just the family with plenty of leftovers for the next day. This is the best baked beans recipe you will ever taste. Perfect barbecue side dish recipe. Delicious homemade baked beans with canned beans and bacon.

Ingredients

two 53 ounce cans of Van Camps Pork and Beans
2 1/2 cups of brown sugar
5 hot dogs, sliced into circles
1 cup of onion, finely diced
4 tablespoons Heinz Ketchup
2 tablespoons yellow mustard
one 16 ounce package bacon

Instructions

- 1 Add all the ingredients, except the bacon to a large 9 x 13 baking pan
- 2 Stir well to combine.
- 3 Arrange bacon slices across the top of the beans.
- 4 Bake in a 350-degree oven for 2 1/2 hours or until the bacon is browned and slightly crispy.



Crock Pot Scalloped Potatoes

Author: [Arlene Mobley - Flour On My Face](#) Prep Time: 20 mins Cook Time: 4 hours

Total Time: 4 hours 20 minutes Yield: 8 1x Category: Crock Pot recipe Cuisine: American

Description

Cheese Homemade scallop potatoes are easy to turn into this Crock Pot Scalloped Potatoes recipe

Ingredients

- 8 medium russet potatoes thinly sliced (about 4 cups)
- 3 cups milk
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon [salt](#)
- 1/2 teaspoon [smoked paprika](#)
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, divided

Instructions

- 1 Thinly slice the potatoes with a mandolin on the thinnest slicing blade setting.
- 2 As you slice the potatoes place the slices in a large bowl of salted cold water and set aside.
- 3 In a medium saucepan melt the butter.
- 4 Add the flour, pepper, paprika and [salt](#). Whisk until combined.
- 5 Cook on medium high for 2 minutes whisking the entire time.
- 6 Slowly add 1 cup of milk to the saucepan and whisk until combined.
- 7 Add the remaining milk to the pan and cook for 5 minutes, whisking until the sauce has thickened.
- 8 Remove the saucepan from the heat and add 1 cup of shredded sharp cheddar cheese and mix until combined. Set aside.
- 9 Drain the potato slices in a [colander](#) well, removing as much water as possible.
- 10 Grease the bottom of a [6-quart crock pot](#).
- 11 Cover the entire bottom of the crock pot with a double layer of potato slices.
- 12 Spread 1 cup of the cheese sauce over the entire surface of the potato layer.
- 13 Repeat 3 more times ending with a layer of cheese sauce.
- 14 Place a triple layer of paper towels over the top of the crock pot and place the lid on.
- 15 Cook for 4 hours on low. 30 minutes before the end of cooking time spread the remaining cheddar cheese over the top and replace the paper towels. Cover and cook until the cheese is melted and the potatoes are tender.